

Overcoming 4 common passive candidate objections



Some things are just hard to do. But recruiting top tech talent doesn't have to be. See how Dice can help.

Turning a “No” into a “Maybe” or “Yes.”

We'll discuss some great approaches to overcoming typical objections you're likely to hear when you get passive tech candidates to respond to your emails or calls.

“ Great recruiters are intuitive...they read candidates well, and can quickly determine what factors are important to them. Then, in a genuine way, they persuade them to consider a role that’s a good match. It’s not about being slick or crafty. ”

Pam Gleason

Executive Director of Recruiting, CACI

Technology people are generally turned off by “salesy” approaches

In prior articles, we acknowledged that most technologists – especially those who aren’t active job seekers – are turned off by salesy messages from recruiters. They’re averse to anything that feels slick, treats them like buyers, or comes off as too pushy, too early in the relationship.

Having said that, recruiters who find success in passive candidate recruitment are tenacious. They see that objection or lack of response as a normal part of the process that may take weeks or months to overcome. They’re up for the challenge and recognize that getting top tech talent to change their job, project focus, boss or commute requires more than a cleverly scripted come back.

Define your own success before you pick up the phone

First, unlike active candidate recruiting – where you can quickly move a candidate from apply to interview to offer – recruiting passives may take many two-way conversations before you even get a resume or a commitment to formally apply. Most of the time, you probably won't get the hire from the first, second or third passive candidate you speak to. So, you must set your expectations. Passive candidate recruiting must lead to hires – sure – but you also need to see success when you:

- Build new relationships and plant seeds for future networking
- Generate additional short-term leads and referrals
- Gain new insights into the marketplace

Second, when you do have a qualified candidate who seems interested but isn't ready to apply, you need to see success when moving from "No" to 1) "Maybe" or 2) "Yes, I'll talk to the hiring manager to learn more." Forward progress along the interest scale – not just your daily call-to-interview ratio – must be considered a win.

Third, not all objections should be overcome. Frankly, some objections *are* deal breakers. A candidate who tells you she needs to work from home three days a week to care for her baby should probably not be convinced to commute 60 minutes each way for a 60 hour per week office job. A candidate who loves managing people and cross-functional projects, is pursuing an MBA and hasn't written code in two years, should probably not be convinced to return to a purely coding job. It's unlikely either of these candidates would be a happy, motivated, high-performing employee.

Having said that, you will come across passive candidates who throw up barriers that can and should be overcome. If you believe in the opportunity, and genuinely see them as a good match, you must work to move them along the interest scale until you either 1)

determine it isn't a good match or 2) get them to the interview stage. Remember, preparation is key. Not only should you learn about their motivators and backgrounds, know the marketplace and competitive landscape, and be prepared to share detailed insights into your own opportunities, but you should also think through your responses to the most common objections you're likely to hear.

Overcoming passive tech candidate objections

Below are four common objections from passives and some of the ways (there is not *one* way) you can use active listening, questions and reframing counterpoints to address concerns and overcome barriers. Let's start with the biggie – the one you're likely to hear most often.

1. I'm not looking to make a move right now.

Option A. Great, I hear you. After all, I called YOU. The kind of person we're looking for to build/lead XYZ is going to be a top performer, and probably pretty happy in their current role.

Option B. I completely get that – that's why I called you. Frankly, the kind of person we'd want to hire would probably not have a current resume put together.

Option C. Based on what I learned about you (share a few specifics you learned via research), I know you'd be a great match for what we want. But, you're probably not actively looking to make a move. Candidly, (your company) probably pays you top dollar, ensures you're working on the most interesting technologies and projects, and has you working for the best manager. Right? (Pause for response.) Do you feel like you're getting everything you want in your career right now at (company)?

Then ...

What would it take to get someone with your accomplishments to even consider making a move?

Option D. What kind of opportunity would get you even *remotely* interested?

“ Remember, your goal is to get them to the next step. I often use VPs and our internal, well-known luminaries to attract them “to the table” – sometimes it’s a call, sometimes it’s a coffee chat. ”

Chetta Crowley

Director of Strategic Hiring, Groupon

Option E. What is the next step in your career? Where will you go after the job you’re in now? What’s missing? (Criteria may include job content, product focus, tech exposure, personal development, impact, work culture, boss, commute, pay, etc.)
If that doesn’t work, I typically go to ...

I appreciate where you’re coming from. How did you find your current role? (Or how did your current role find you?) Did you work with a recruiter or get referred into this job? I generally find that people with your skills end up with roles based on calls like these. Someone finds you or refers you versus you going out and applying for jobs. In my experience, the best people want to be aware of their value in the marketplace and stay connected to someone like me, since I specialize in recruiting for (your specialty) and am quite networked in the tech space.

So that I know when to call you in the future, what would the ideal opportunity need to look like for you to even consider making a move?

Option F. I appreciate where you're coming from. I'd hate to have you make a decision about this opportunity before you learn a little more about how it might help you get to that next level. Would you at least be open to a 15-minute call during your morning or evening commute to talk directly to our (hiring manager or Director of X), so that he can do a better job of explaining (what's missing for the candidate – i.e. bigger tech challenges, cooler technology, etc.) and answer any questions you have? Just 15 minutes, not an interview. Simply a casual Q&A session to learn more.

Option G. I appreciate that you're not interested in making a move right now. I know this may sound a little salesy, but this is a unique time in our (industry/company), and this opportunity won't exist three months from now. Specifically, the person who lands this role will (be really specific about what they'd impact – i.e. build/architect X, which will shape the way our company/the industry does Y for years to come – you could be a big part of that).

2. I'm committed to my boss/project/team – timing isn't good.

Option A. I hear you and respect that. The kind of person we'd want to hire wouldn't leave their team/boss in a bind. They're achievement-oriented, so they'd want to be sure they delivered something significant before making a move. Having said that, sometimes a career opportunity comes along that's exceptional – it's worth it to at least learn more. And even if the timing isn't good now, it can be a good idea to plant some seeds now for the future.

Option B. I didn't expect to call you today and have you say, "Yes, here's my resume. When can I interview?" The kind of recruiting I do often involves longer-term relationships that start with calls like this. It's my job as a recruiter who specializes in (tech area) to know key players like you. So I really appreciate your time. Is there anyone in your network who deserves a better job than they have

now? I'd love an introduction to them. Your intro would really help them understand that I'm not just another recruiter. For example, I noticed you're connected to ... (specific leads).

3. Do I have leads? Not really. I don't know anyone that's looking right now.

The type of person we're going to hire is probably someone like you – not actively looking for a job. We'd like to find a very successful person who is maybe ready for that next-level career move. Who do you respect? Who is the strongest (job title) you've worked with?

- Search their online networks in advance to solicit an intro to someone you'd want to target. Run some names by them. (I noticed you're connected to X ...)
- Ask for advice on how to find someone like them. Share that you've already sourced the low-hanging fruit and where you run into barriers. They may help you uncover new sources, generate new referrals/leads/targets, or gather new market intelligence (i.e. a struggling startup that's got great talent or a big mega tech company that is about to announce a major reorganization). Highlight that it's good for them to have a relationship with several recruiters. You never know when something will change or when a friend will ask you for career advice. I'm a good person to know. I can be a resource to you now and in the future – put me in your address book (not trash can).

4. I'd only make a move if it was significantly more money

Option A. I hear you. What would significantly more money look like to you? What kind of package would it take to get you to consider a move?

“ Recruiting is a full contact sport. ”

Steve Levy

Recruiting Strategist, Outside-the-Box Consulting

Then ...

When I've been able to get approval for an exceptional offer like that in the past, the hiring manager and I have had to make a great case as to why this person deserves such a big increase. What can you tell me about your accomplishments that might help me position a request like that?

And then ...

Why don't I get you on the phone with the hiring manager for 20 minutes for an exploratory chat? You have an impressive background, and I know she'd like to learn more about you, beyond what we learned (online or from the person who referred you). Then, she can share a little more about the technical environment and challenges they're working on, and you two can talk about where you'd make the biggest impact.

Option B. Your compensation would depend on your track record – what you can do – and frankly, how well you interview. I'd love to learn more about you now, so that I can help us understand if this is a good match. If it gets to the point where you're interested, I can help you prepare for the interview.

Option C. I think you may be quite a bit more senior than the current opportunity I'm recruiting for. Could I learn a little more about your background, so that I can determine if some of my other, higher paying, more senior level roles would be a better fit for you?

Option D. It sounds like I can't meet those expectations in the short term, but I really appreciate that you shared that with me. If it's okay with you, I'd like to follow your career, connect online, and check in with you in X months. In the meantime, I may need to rethink the compensation for this package if we want to attract someone of your caliber. So that I'm smarter about the market, can you tell me what your current compensation package looks like and what you think the fair/typical pay is for someone with (X years of experience)? That will help me build the case.

Option E. If money is your primary motivator, I agree, this may not be a good fit. The kind of person that will thrive here will certainly want to be paid for her performance, but will also highly value the opportunity to [build, scale, lead, impact, work on X challenge, learn). What else, in addition to more money, would it take for you to consider a move?

After every conversation ...

Always send the candidate a follow-up email with your contact information, a small networking paragraph or two with a quick overview of what's in it for them, a request to follow their career, and an invitation to connect on their preferred social network.

Finally, encourage them to call you anytime (give them your mobile number, too).

The best responses

There is not one ultimate comeback. Whatever your specific approach, the most successful recruiters tend to respond by:

- Actively listening to their concerns and not discounting or discarding them. R-E-S-P-E-C-T.
- Leveraging clarifying questions or reframing questions (over arguments) to move a candidate along the interest scale and get the candidate to think about this as a great step forward in their career, not just another job.
- Demonstrating a personalized approach – a sincere interest in a two-way fit – and a relationship-oriented tone versus a “help me fill this req” tone.

There are entire workshops and books focused on cold calling and overcoming objections. In this article, I wanted to give you some practical phrasing and share some different approaches.

And, you have to find your own voice. You have to practice. And remember, to some extent, this isn't supposed to be easy. But it doesn't have to be hard or scary when you see your role as something other than a salesperson that has to close this deal today.